

The Ghost Murders of Shanghai

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This is a work of fiction. Historical events inspire it and serve as a metaphor for human behavior. However, this book's names, characters, and persons *are entirely fictional*. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

This book uses the official romanization of Hanyu pinyin of mainland China for Chinese names, places, and terms. Names for individuals show family names first and the personal name second. The exception is the name for Chiang Kai-shek and the Kuomintang party, as in this case, many international readers recognize the Wade and Giles spelling easier. Japanese names use familiar Western romanization. English, according to American style and spelling. Phonetic accents are not applied.

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Poem: Shanghai

Shanghai

Translucent as crystal,

Obscure as memories

I stroll through the lucidity,

And perceive all

Encircled by majestic crowns

Enclosed by intricate thoughts

Encompassed by dancing bodies

Yet, beneath the surface

Lies radiance and obscurity

Rituals and offerings?

How many demises

How many lives

How many outcasts

How many depraved

How many spirits

Can be revived

By how many sacrifices?

History reveals a dreadful irony

human suffering forgotten

上海

半透明像水晶一样

模糊如记忆一般

我漫步在澄澈中

感知万物

周围环绕着庄严的王冠

被错综复杂的思想包围

在舞动的身体环抱中

然而，表面之下

存在着光辉和黑暗

仪式或者祭品？

有多少人去世

有多少生命

有多少弃儿

有多少堕落

有多少灵魂

可以复活

经过多少牺牲？

历史揭示一个可怕的讽刺

人类的苦难被遗忘

Prologue

USA, Chicago, 21st century

"My friend, we have known each other for some time now. Your professional attitude is astounding, but I have seen more of you than you might realize. I know you are addicted to a drug as you told me, and I appreciate your honesty. Your students here have learned much from your teachings, although sometimes you can be rude. I must be honest with you. Your fixation on dance might prove mentally dangerous."

"My dear Jeremy, we had a good time, but it is over now. You should not worry about the few times I passed out. They are harmless enough."

"I was quite surprised to see you experience so many altered states of mind while under the influence, and I'll be frank. I advise you to see a specialist about these dreams you have. They obviously refer to a traumatic event."

"Thanks, you are a good friend, even for the short time we have known each other. I have enough strength now to face all of it. I do not need help. I will travel this road alone."

"Don't you think it is time to integrate your past with your present?"

"I intend to dance to plenty of 'red flowers' being there! Stop bothering me, Jeremy. I am too drunk."

"This is really new; I never knew you could use dance for healing. Who is this now?"

"Never you mind, it is all mine, but he doesn't know."

"He? Who is he?"

"It does not matter; we all live under the same sky!"

Past Superiority: Present Ghosts of Darkness?

Does narcissism create a history of destruction? Yes, it does! It destroys without remorse, but we forget that the ghost of superiority is created, even if it is born from the womb of naivety.

A few years before his birth, the Japanese Imperial Army General Staff recognized the need for more than just soldiers to secure victory on the Asian continent. They turned their attention to training covert agents, equipping them with the languages of their enemies-Russian and Chinese. These agents were tasked with infiltrating the ranks of prominent anti-Japanese figures, spying on them in every possible way. The students of this 'academy' were taught the arts of manipulation, planning, and creating activities to undermine solidarity in the nations Japan sought to expand into. It was in this world that our protagonist was born.

After his parents decided on his future, at age 16, they sent him to this special military unit. There, he became part of a small circle of anointed students covertly adopted as protégés by General Hideki Tojo. Soon, he was skilled in the art of coercion, sabotage, and subversion. In this circle, he was presented with his first identity; it taught him how to be a spy. Even though Japan still had no network of covert activities, he knew how to penetrate every circle of society. Shanghai was his designated field of operation, and he invented a method for gaining money and power that had never been seen before in the spying business. His loyalty was a constant question mark, as he was ingrained with a more private sense of superiority. His appearance was that of a young man, approximately twenty years old. He claimed not to know his date of birth, as was the case with so many people in those days. His first covert action was penetrating the notorious Shanghainese criminal organization, the "Green Gang". The rest would follow inevitably. He would not stop at simplistic gains.

Shanghai 1920,
"Why should I trust you? I have plenty of men who can do the job, and basically, you are just a young bastard. Start talking, I have little patience." Behind his chair, which looked like a throne, one of his henchmen stood staring at the young man. "By the way," the boss of the Green Gang,

Huang Jinrong, continued," this is Kai Feng. He is my trusted secretary." Kai Feng looked at the bastard with nothing but contempt. "What is your name?" he demanded.

"My name is Wang Lang," he answered while having no respect for the big boss, and certainly not for Kai Feng, but he had prostrated himself on his knees and bowed his head. He kowtowed his head on the floor three times as if he kowtowed to an emperor. He knew a precarious situation could arise if he displayed the wrong attitude. He learned how to deceive when he was very young. From an early age, this acting and spying fascinated him. He would hide in corners and behind doors and spy on courtesans when they prepared to receive and entertain clients. He increasingly enjoyed spying. He learned it could be a source of feeling superior. Soon, he discovered how to blackmail courtesans and their clients, giving him power and money.

Not all targets were willing victims. That is how he learned to eliminate those who did not comply. And he found he enjoyed the feeling. He became obsessed, not with eliminating or spying, but with the sense of superiority and the money. He began experimenting to evoke this feeling, ultimately by strangling some courtesans. It was the best feeling he ever experienced. Even more potent was the sense of getting away with it. Nobody expected he could be the perpetrator. He would cry floods of tears when police questioned him, explaining he had nothing to do with the murders. He would create a horrifying display with their bodies, smearing her face with white clay powder and red lipstick. The police concluded that these murders were the result of an angry customer. He hysterically cried his eyes out when questioned, and, pretending to be their lover, or he claimed he was the son of one of the murdered courtesans, now homeless and alone. A hoax, as he never grew up in China and was trained in Japan. Sometimes, he claimed his deprived mother had discarded him in the Xin Puyu Tang orphanage on Lujiabang Road in Shanghai. It provided him with a convincing identity, adequately covering the expansion of his activities.

He would gain sympathy by explaining that the circumstances in the orphanage were lousy and that left and right, he saw fellow orphans die of silent starvation and diseases. He further boasted he despised the Catholic nuns who managed the far too-crowded place with their reprimands and threats of their celestial judgments. When he was done creating his identity, he supposedly "escaped" from the orphanage. None of it was true. In reality, the orphanage was where he made his first kill, leaving behind one nun's mutilated corpse, satisfying his urge to dominate women. Since then, he prided himself in fearing nothing, or, at least, so it seemed.

As a result of some petty crimes, he was caught overstepping the boundaries of the Green Gang, which was also involved in the business of extortion. Dragged before one of its bosses, he pleaded to serve. By then, he hated anything or anyone who would stand in the way of his feeling of superiority. Whether women, men, or even children, ideas of righteousness in politics, and most of all, he hated compassion. And he despised every person who would get in the way of his strategies for domination.

He had acquired unmentionable habits in communicating with relatively "normal" persons, as his feeling of superiority demanded increasingly complicated deeds to satisfy it. The schemes he planned became inimitable to almost anybody. In time, internally, he silenced and murdered any compassionate feeling, making him feel even more superior. All in all, nevertheless, he managed to appear likable. The Green Gang boss before him now would be fooled easily.

"I can accomplish whatever you want me to do," he answered modestly. The boss rather liked this rascal with his cheeky appearance and continued to question him, "Have you ever killed someone?"

"No sir, never," he answered, and this, of course, was untrue.

"Can you drive a car?"

"Yes, sir, but I might do with better qualities."

"Oh?!" the boss grunted, as he wasn't used to anyone altering his line of conversation, "So then, what are your qualities?"

The young bastard, not that young, carefully outweighed his following answer, "I can make people believe whatever you want them to believe," making sure this would be in the interest of the boss, he continued bragging in an almost modest tone of voice, "One might say, even if a person appalls smoking opium, I can get them to like, enjoy and become habitually addicted to it, just as an example, of course. I speak Japanese as well. I know many important people. And, oh yes, I can persuade women to do whatever I want!"

"I prohibit anyone in my service to smoke opium; we do not consume our own product." This boss was not an idiot; he could see the bastard trying to impress him, but he enjoyed it. And that was exactly what the bastard played for.

"You are hired. The rules are simple. You don't smoke; you get your kicks in brothels. You dress properly and serve me in my contacts. In time, you can become one of my loyal secretaries. If I find out, you scheme behind my back or create your own little business, talk to the police or other gangs, I will eliminate you. And you must remember, I own the police in the French district. They will inform me about anything immediately. You will have to

earn my trust and begin with driving my car. You will be given a driver's uniform."

Kowtowing again, the bastard answered, 'I will serve you, even if it costs me my life.' And he thought, 'I will never give my life for anyone, certainly not for the one who is only a temporary meal ticket.'

"Don't be an idiot," the boss continued. We'd instead assassinate others. Stand up and receive your first assignment. It will be proof of your loyalty to me and show me if you have the stomach to be part of our group. I want you to kill a woman who has been nagging me for some time now, writing bad things in the newspaper. It will be your first kill. Go!"

Silently, he reflected, 'No, it won't be my first; I lost count a long time ago.' But he got up and bowed, saluted, much to the boss's pleasure, and went on his merry way, thinking, 'And I would betray you too; I would betray or murder anybody who would keep me from my goals and my well-deserved pleasures. I have become God and will teach this world about it! I will have money, and I will have power.' And, while bragging against no one in particular, he was convinced, mostly, when he rehearsed this thought standing in front of the mirror because, of all things, he truly loved himself. Huang's current secretary, Kai Feng, would be his first choice to disappear from Big Boss Huang's side as a "supposed" victim of a gang war and opium-related incident in Shanghai's French district. Though not before the rascal had become "the first runner-up".

Shanghai, March 3, 2010 7 P.M.

I realized that this book of poems with its messages was all about me! As soon as I read the poems, they made me explode into pride! They were written during Shanghai's wild and brassy times up to 1945. Two women shared their hardships with men, and I realized this hardship could have been mine, cause and effect alike. It awakened me from my long and sleeping existence, and I realized I needed to execute myself to express the joy of my existence! Soon, the Shanghai International Expo will begin, and I will make it the beginning of my quest.

I do not like this Expo much. I saw some dancers gather at Fuzhou Lu and realized Shanghai is no longer Chinese. I peeked inside their school building, and it made me angry. Is this the country I once loved? A younger version? Am I schizophrenic? I would think not! I will act and reverse its changes! It is a beautiful dream! I am mentally developing! Since last week, I realized my life has a new meaning. Through the revelation of my ultimate

goal, I experienced the dark side of harmony, virtue and love, femininity, masculinity, and faith. There are so many hungry ghosts; it is high time they receive some company. Currently, they feed on the living; instead, they should be rewarded with the lives of the dead.

Last night, my lost comrade appeared at the foot of my bed. He seemed to have flown in through the open window, and then it just sat there, grinning, attempting to convey a message. His begging eyes stared fiercely, and his fingers with extended nails wafted as if to say, 'Come, come.' His skin was white, not lively white, but the type of white you find on decaying cemented walls of old buildings. It was illuminating to see this sad creature; it felt like it was part of a necessary transformation, simultaneously scared and invigorating. I was reminded that there once was a dancer, moving gracefully and attractive in younger years, but now old. It dominated my dream. Unaware of either being asleep or awake, I found that, lately, these phenomena appeared more frequently when the time for a public performance was short.

Then, a ghost appeared. A living death image from the past, more potent than our people had ever seen. He told me he would protect me in my strivings. It took a while before I realized it would be an honor to return to the past to live in the present. To give back life into death. Eventually, to produce life into a beloved idol. And this would take work, hard work. Some admiration secretly went beyond the spiritual, but such was not allowed. Like the dancer Wu Xiaobang, it was too magnificent beyond the spiritual; simultaneously, not lusting was a sin. "Are you a man or woman?" I questioned this magnificent flying ghost. It looked somewhat strange. His skull had a hole in it, and through the hole, I could see the universe. "In dead," it replied, "man or woman is unimportant; only the living dead is. In you, my ambition is to live a thousand years!"

All this was relatively relieving to me; life and death were a pejorative that made me feel more important than scared; I was becoming important! I postponed thoughts on either man, woman, or the undecided. "But can you give me your name, honorable ghost of the past?" He did not need to hop any longer, as he could fly. "My name is 'The Ghost of Shanghai,' and I am you!" he said decisively, which, at first, confused me, for I am not The Ghost of Shanghai. Therefore, it could not be me, but I granted this ghost of the past its mistakes because it made me feel in control of reality, and I did not mind the prospect of becoming an eternal ghost.

To me, control is so significant. The viciousness by which some lovers feel superior and diminish you into nothingness must always be avenged at some time or other. That nothingness made me hate women and men, and though women are usually not much more lovable, at least

they have the decency to be victims. Thus, establishing this unsurmountable fact of life, I reviewed my theatrical equipment. All here? I will become the most memorable performer in the galaxy today. I rolled my long, black, lavish hair in a knot with some small hair tufts to the side. I would have loved to paint my face white like a Japanese Geisha, but such would be too conspicuous.

It did not snow last night, which was a pity as that would have made me even more genuinely feel uplifted. I realized my final goal was to fly, gaze at the heavens, and burn like a phoenix to save the souls of the dead. I decided that would take some necessary and thorough practice, and I also imagined how to accomplish such an obvious solution to my embryonic being. My long legs would be highly suitable for the task.

I was strolling around the streets of Shanghai, close to the dance company's location, planning and looking for a favorite subject, preferably one I hated most. But first, there was this excruciating day full of irritation and contempt. It was a day of trying not to see the dirty bodies, sweaty breasts, horrible lousy attitudes, and lack of commitment. All would be better this evening; it was a promise. They had no idea I was stalking them. I so much enjoyed fooling everybody.

The opportunity presented itself earlier. She changed her training suit quickly and professionally, so it did not seem inviting. Gathering her gear, unused ballet shoe points, and leotard and stuffing them into a small backpack, she left the building quickly, not even saying goodbye to anyone. I could see she had been crying. It was easy to follow her as she entered the subway station, dropped her bag nonchalantly on the baggage check, picked it up again, scanned it with a prepaid ticket, and entered the proper lane. It was not difficult to know where she was going. Her ponytail was long and jumped from left to right as she seemed to have an aggressive dance in her steps; I concluded, 'She certainly must be furious. Such arrogance!'

The subway wagon was quite busy this time of day. A rush hour of at least three hours was regular in Shanghai. Next to the exit, where she waited, her attention was diverted by a workman who seemed to be sleeping while leaning on his broomstick stuck in a bucket. It breathed the atmosphere of silent endurance, an everyday repetition of waiting for the next stop.

She left the subway at West Yan'an Road, checked out, and quickly left the station, hopping down the stairs, crossing the road, and slipping into the alleyway. Opening the door to the building, then opening the apartment door. As quick as she was, the advantage made it easy to slip in behind her and place a foot between the apartment door. Startled, she turned around, but it was too late then. I was already inside.

After the deed was accomplished, I employed my phone to preserve the memory and photographed the scene upwards, downwards, and sideward. I pinpointed one of the poems on the body of my death victim, and I planted the traces I had stolen from him while he was asleep. It would make a beautiful choreography, a genuine dance macabre, brought into a living modern reality...a testament to the crime of contemporary styles: modern bodies deprived of the revolutionary tradition. My feet were hurting, and I was happy to lose the ballet points he had used. I decided to buy a new pair for every new occasion. Struggling home, I ensured my comrade was still sleeping. The idiot would never find out what was happening.

When he finally woke up, I ensured he continued the conversation as if nothing had happened. He looked at the arm and wondered where the puncture mark came from. And then, in a panic-stricken state, his fantasy did the rest. He continued to pretend he had been awake all the time. As always, the old sleepy geezer he talked with never understood a thing.

Shanghai, March 3, 2010: 8 PM: Living to Dance

One of the most tedious and depressing jobs Li An needed to support herself was dancing at the Paramount. You could not call it dancing. Her job was to engage in ballroom dances with tourists and, most of the time, teach them, to give them a sense of the old-time Shanghai Renaissance of the nineteen twenties. Unfortunately, there was no big band to enjoy, just a piano player who believed in doing all the jazz tunes without sheet music and had no sense of rhythm. Sometimes, a tiny jazz combo would play at the Paramount. They could play well, making the ballroom teaching task so much easier. Not today...

Today, Li An danced with a male tourist who could not dance at all. He was American, clearly an ex-pat, and the faint scent of aftershave came from his clothes. She kept smiling while the man stepped on her toes and, at one point, even kicked her shen. Li An wasn't sure if he did so deliberately, as he kept asking if she needed to sit down, and he would be happy to pay for her time, and they could have a drink together. Li An politely declined. It was obvious he wanted something other than learning ballroom dancing.

Li An, 24, had long black hair, which she carried in a ponytail. It was the most practical hairstyle as not having to brush it all the time. She had dark eyes; one was slightly higher placed than the other, which made her face interesting. She could mimic many different expressions using her eyebrows, which ensured she was in demand for theatrical performances and sometimes high-paying advertisement jobs. Years of training made her strong and agile; her walk was determined.

She did not have a typical upbringing. Her grandmother raised her after her parents had died in a car accident. Her grandmother, Chen Yun, from her mother's side, too, was atypical. Born in 1926, Chen Yun had lived in Shanghai all her life. The old lady was now eighty-four, but she was still very independent and had urged Li An to live on her own. "I can take care of myself," Chen Yun expressed, "You need to experience independence, and I do not want you to take care of me unless it is absolutely necessary!"

The grandparents from Li An's father's side had opposed her parents' marriage from the beginning and extended their aversion to their grandchild, not wanting to take on its care after the car accident. Grandmother Chen Yun had been a dancer in a modern style of Chinese

dance after the war with Japan and in the early times of the Peoples Republic. Circumstances made her change her career to work in a state-owned pharmacy. She admired Wu Xiaobang, a famous Chinese choreographer and dancer, and the free-style choreographies of Isadora Duncan. Beautiful modern choreographies were performed in contemporary China as well.

Once, Chen Yun took Li An to a ballet performance called "Rouge", choreographed by Zhang Yunfang and danced by Liu Yan in 2002. The beautiful piece reminded Chen of the old Shanghai days and women's struggle for freedom. Ever since watching the performance, Li An became attracted to ballet. She admired the spiritual strength of her grandmother. Chen Yun embraced the principles of emancipation her entire life. Her attitude was not entirely in line with later party directives nor the paternalistic culture in China, which could not simply be erased by communism. Thus, forced to abandon the ballet, the job in the pharmacy kept her independent and ensured her freedom to socialize with people from all walks of life. "I was born emancipated", Chen Yun would remind her granddaughter," and all my life, I fought to keep my emancipated nature, even giving up dance to maintain it." She had a lover once, but he disappeared in the turmoil of later years.

Under the wings of Chen Yun, Li An was raised with a sense of independence. It was a life quieter than most of her peers, though Li An was not without ambition. Following her grandmother's footsteps and having a body suitable for harsh training, Li An chose a career in dancing. Her romance with the standard academic schools did not last very long, and after almost finishing basic training, she left the academy.

Li An now shared a small apartment with a roommate, Xiao Du, and both were engaged in an independent dance company. For Li An, the company was a dream come true as she felt she could express her dance capacity without the constraints of formal ballet academies. It made her feel close to her grandmother. She understood Chen Yun's sense of freedom and would never forget those sacred words in her grandmother's tone of voice, "I was born emancipated." Academic discipline had been a disappointment to Li An. The training usually started at a very early age and was focused on muscle tension and muscular flexibility. Those elements tend to be over-important, and as a result, most dance choreographies also overstressed flexibility. It made the dances look like gymnastics competitions in which the music served as a servant to the acrobatic movements. Li An loved music considerably more than the enslavement to flexibility and muscle tone.

But ballroom dancing at the Paramount was a terrible way to make a living. She hoped that the dance company, Fùxīng Jiǎnyuē, *Revive Simplicity*, would win the attention of financial support from the Ministry of Culture, as the company aimed to perform a choreography during the period of the Shanghai World Expo 2010, which began in May and lasted until October.

The Fuxing dance company, as it was called in the short version, combined dance education with performance. What Li An liked was its international composition. Fuxing was small but had dancers from all over the world. Performers were considered to be learning the typical style of Fuxing and were, therefore, simultaneously students and performers.

The company group consisted of thirteen dancers in total. Li An liked most of her fellow dancers. Xiao Du, a fellow student and her roommate, was lovely. She came from a modest background, with parents in the countryside. Her parents supported her dancing ambition because she showed a remarkable sense of rhythm and dance since early childhood. They were very proud of her and had saved money for her education. And Xiao Du worked triple as hard to accomplish her goals and also worked on the side.

Li An was very tired. It wasn't a good week for her. In the beginning, she had been somewhat under the weather, and training for the performance and fulfilling the job at the dance hall as a ballroom teacher was a bit too much. She hardly complained as she felt this was her life; she chose it, and her independence depended on these choices. It was now seven o'clock at night, and she thought of nothing else but to go home, eat, maybe have a pleasant conversation with her roommate, and then crash into bed. Nevertheless, she decided to pass by the school to collect some study material and learn about the new class schedule. It could be that Xiao Du was also there, and they might get a bite at the temporal food market, which appeared standard each evening. Noodles with vegetables and hot chestnuts would make a sufficient meal for the day.

The school building had two floors, and both floors had dance studios. When practice would be done in one studio, teaching would be done in the other. Each studio had a separate changing room, no showers, just water. Li An entered the changing room expecting to find her roommate there. When she entered, she encountered some fellow dancers who had just finished their practice, but Xiao Du wasn't present. And the group, who were chatting lively before, suddenly fell silent. "What is going on?" Li An

asked as she realized unmistakably that something unexpected had happened. One of the male dancers, Tai Lan, approached her and motioned her outside in the hallway.

Once there, he whispered, " There has been a terrible quarrel between Yi Sun and Xiao Du," he explained. Yi Sun, one of the company's female "star" dancers, was not known for her pleasant behavior. Tai Lan looked worried, continuing, " Xiao Du had difficulty making an arabesque during practice. She had a problem with her pelvis and maybe just a technical flaw. Yi Sun, however, started scolding her. In her bitchy way, she remarked that Xiao Du would never amount to anything needed for the performance. She wondered why "on earth" Xiao Du was still engaged in the company. 'peasant girls do not belong in sophisticated circles' Yi Sun claimed. Xiao Du first attempted to answer when Yi Sun continued scolding, saying, 'Do you actually know any other speech than Wu-dialect? Do you know what you look like in the mirror? Have you ever realized that your nose is crooked? And for a simple arabesque, you need to have at least hips slimmer than yours?' After that, Xiao Du broke down and walked away crying. We were all shocked".

Li An felt anger rising as Yi Sun habitually put fellow dancers down whenever she was frustrated. She blackened the atmosphere within the company, relying only on her wealthy and influential parents. "Didn't anybody interfere with this?" Li An was perplexed. "Well, actually..., Yi Sun was not yet finished. We were all too flabbergasted when she blabbered out that Xiao Du would never 'get the one' with whom she was currently infatuated, however long she waited ", Tai continued apologetically, " Xiao Du then stormed out of here. Yi Sun immediately left, going after her and laughing at her to make things worse. They were both gone before we could say anything." Li An was appalled by the lack of support Xiao Du had received.

The dominating, aggressive role of Yi Sun worsened with the approach of possible selection for the coming performance, and she was the type of person who was used to having her way in any situation. She lived in her spoiled bubble, and nobody corrected her behavior except for Li An. "You better go after Xiao Du. I have a meeting later." Tai looked away, definitely not trying to confront Li An's question. Li An did not say goodbye while leaving. Her roommate needed her, she concluded. She hurried to the subway station. Rush hour in Shanghai lasted until at least eight o'clock. Taxis were out of the question, and it would take her at least thirty minutes to get to Yan'an West Road.

She tried to phone Xiao Du but received no answer, which worried her. Xiao Du never got used to city life. Li An knew she missed her family

and had difficulty dealing with some harsher aspects of urban life. Li An hurried up the escalator into the station and into the subway carriage, almost stumbling over the bucket of one of the cleaners who had finished his job. She was careful not to slip over the wet floor. Reaching her stop, she quickly got off the subway and hurried home. At the apartment door, she hesitated; something was wrong, and she could clearly feel it. But she was not prepared for the scene she encountered when entering.

It seemed the door was already open. "Xiao Du!" she called, "Are you there?! I am home!" All remained silent. There was a faint smell of iron, and the carpet in the hallway had been moved to the side. Xiao Du's shoes were scattered over the floor. 'She must be furious,' Li An concluded momentarily, but the silence increased her worry. They both had a room in the apartment and shared one other small space between the rooms, where they ate and watched television, and a water cooker and microwave oven provided them with basic cooking. They had shared many pleasurable evenings there, talking, laughing, and happy about their friendship.

That communal space would never be the same after Li An entered. She screamed at what she found. There were enormous amounts of blood. Leotards were ripped apart and scattered all over the place, and amid this chaos, Xiao Du lay on their couch, forearms, and wrists cut open lengthwise. Li An ran out of the apartment, banging on several doors of neighbors she had never seen before and who did not seem home until one door opened. A man noticed her panic-stricken face and understood when she called out, "Police! We need the police and an ambulance!!" He guided her in, sat her down on a chair, and remarked, "Don't you have a cell phone?" But Li An was shaken all over, and her hands trembled so heavy she would not have been able to do anything, and, in shock, she dropped her phone in the apartment. "It is apartment 15 b, and my roommate had an accident! I think she is dead!"

The man realized he could not send her away and, with a faint sigh, phoned the emergency number, calling the police and requesting an ambulance. Neither could get through quickly during the rush-hour traffic. He had the courtesy to give Li An a chair and a cup of tea but was not eager to go to the apartment. "We will wait here for the police," he decided. At her request, reluctantly, he gave his phone to Li An. Shivering, she contacted one of her closest friends from the school, Eikichi, a student from Japan. "I'll be there as soon as possible; try to stay calm. You can stay at my place when necessary," he responded.

While her neighbor kept looking at his watch, Li An sat down, slowly breathing in and out. She did not want to alarm her grandmother immediately and realized this apartment building was occupied by busy, not

very social neighbors. Both waited for the police, and when officers arrived, the neighbor was quick to explain that he had not seen or heard anything, was in a hurry to get home, and promised to visit the station the next day. He identified himself and, after, bluntly told Li An, "Just close the door behind you when you leave. It will lock itself automatically." And gone was he. The apartment building was soon filled with ambulance workers, a forensic team, and Chief Inspector Zhou Fu.

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Inspector Zhou Fu looked around the ravaged apartment.

Clothes were scattered around the place, and they were ripped apart as if a mad monster exercised knifing and slashing. He ensured the other girl, the roommate, stayed at the neighbor's apartment. He would talk to her later. It was good that she had not stayed in the apartment longer than needed. That way, contamination of the crime scene was limited. One sight of the place had made her instinctively depart as she probably realized there was nothing more to do. He would later review her state of mind, but his police instinct told him she could hardly have known about all this, neither could she have been part of the scene. There was so much blood; she could not have done this without being stained by it.

The first officers on sight were shocked, even though they were used to too many emergencies. They were also weary, having been on call for almost 24 hours, and as it was beyond dinnertime, neither officer cared to be too investigative, making sure not to touch any of the evidence on site. They knew in advance that the municipality would not pay their overtime. Zhou Fu was one of those higher-ranking officers who worked overtime along with them, which made him a well-appreciated boss in their eyes. He did not stay in the office as some other bosses did.

Zhou Fu's salary was higher than theirs, though not very high, only RMB 8000. Though this seemed huge compared to lower-level officers, prizes in Shanghai were among the highest in China. Overtime was hardly ever covered; all that depended on available funds, and those were scarcely available.

The ambulance workers knew nothing could be done as the girl was dead. The forensic team arrived and worked the scene efficiently, after which the body could be transferred to the morgue. Zhou Fu hoped this was quite obviously a suicide case, and it promised not to take much time, that is to say, not to take too much overtime. His wife, as patient as she could be, had nagged him about his hours away from home. She had taken on a job to cover their household expenses. Inspector Zhou realized that, while the job entailed an iron rice bowl in the past, those days were over. His salary alone would not pay enough for any future academic education of their boy child, now nine years of age. From both sides, his wonderful grandparents cared for the boy during working hours. The couple, however,

worried about how they would afford care if either of the grandparents fell ill, and they had three of them altogether; the fourth had passed away early.

When they arrived, Zhu looked at his police officers and swallowed a sigh. They were good workers, Qian and Tang, even though the number of frontline officers was too limited. Nobody complained to him about it, but the running joke at the station was that they had more technical equipment available than the number of people running it. This case could be another example of old-fashioned detective work. He hoped the forensics and the pathologist team would support his findings.

The girl had left a suicide note, more particularly a suicide poem. The scene was both gruesome and theatrical. He looked at the scene with disgust and pity and wondered how the girl could have done this to anyone finding her. Leaving a message is one thing, but dressing it up like this comes over like a kind of revenge. Her roommate's clothes had been cut to pieces, leotards all over the place shredded in the middle. Did she hate her roommate? Was she jealous of her roommate?

The body lay backward on the only sofa as if she were looking up at the ceiling. The face of the girl was theatrically made up; it was entirely white, with eyes accentuated with eyeliner and eyeshadow and an abundance of rouge on her cheeks. She had cut both wrists; they had bled all over the place. Obviously, she had not sat on the sofa immediately after cutting, as the blood was everywhere. She had pinned a paper hearth to the chest of the leotard she wore with a large safety pin. The text on the red paper hearth read:

I will not die
Says I
And will not have to

The shores of my thighs
Might tremble
But its force
Lifts me upwards

And he will not die
If he waits a little
I look beyond the boundaries.
And limitless is the red sky
The nightfall
Of eternity
Beyond my self
I will not die

The text seemed blunt and sexual, but the scene was so tragic that any erotic intention died in blood smears. ‘ Unfortunately, she certainly died...’ Zhou could not prevent that thought from occurring. The scene elicited a sense of irony: such a young girl, such a pity.

Zhou talked to the officers on sight; they needed to wait for the ambulance while a forensic photographer took pictures of the scene. It would take hours to handle the paperwork after the medical report would come in. He would have to look at the background and give the course of the suicide, hoping to be able to close the case to the satisfaction of every bureaucratic level.

The girl's parents needed to be informed, which was the most difficult task. If they were not convinced about the cause, they could make it very difficult for the department. If they blamed the police for treating it as a suicide, this would imply the case could not be closed. Every unclosed case would have repercussions for the annual budget. They could lose a bonus of up to 20,000 RMB if they did not reach their quota of solved cases. He would send a female officer to inform the parents, hoping feminine empathy would soften the blow.

It wasn't that Zhou had become indifferent to the suffering of individuals, but somehow, suicides always made him angry. Persons committing suicide left a trail of suffering, family, and friends behind. Zhou considered suicidal individuals to be egotistic and believed they burdened those who loved them and usually worried about them with massive feelings of guilt for having been unable to prevent their deaths. One of his friends, Liu Dafeng, a psychiatrist, strongly opposed Zhou's idea. "Suicide in China," he argued, "when it is the result of domestic injustice, is the result of wrongdoing between family members. The person who commits suicide actually performs an act of resistance. And this might explain why, of all the countries in the world, China has a suicide rate among women, which is higher than men."

Zhou would firmly discuss this with his friend, "Why women?" he would challenge, and Dafeng would answer: "Women are under higher domestic pressure. If they commit suicide, it is often an expression of anger, and women have simply more reasons to be angry within their position. However, I agree that circumstances in China, especially in urban areas, are changing." Zhou would reply to his friend with dry irony, "There are other ways of resistance, don't you agree." Dafeng would counterargue, "Not for everybody, my dear friend, not for everybody. The only problem is that if a person resists through suicide, they cannot enjoy the effect of their resistance. Rather obviously, because by then they will be dead."